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[No. 1

SOME AMERICAN LITERARY NEEDS*

I.

It is pertinent to ask whether or not we are maintaining intact our intellectual inheritance by handing down to our successors the story of new achievement, or by making the repairs and additions necessary in every human structure. If we find, in taking account of stock, that we have barely held our own, it may be possible to determine where the fault lies and attempt its correction. If each department of letters does not make steadily some contribution, permanent as well as new, to the record of man's doings, then our habitual pride may not be justified. Thus, if applied science, a material force, has been developed out of proportion to pure science, an intellectual force, the advance cannot be credited to literature: the record of thought or events.

From the appearance of the white man on this continent there has been a longing to contribute something new and distinctive to the literature of the world; to that story of progress in which *finis* is never written. Even from the first, there was the gathering of the documents upon which formal history is so dependent. Our ancestors had come out of an unrest so persistent as almost to seem the natural state of man. Agi-

* An Address delivered before the Literary Societies of Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Virginia, Wednesday, June 16, 1909.

tation and upheaval had been in the air. Questions deemed religious, though really political, the clash of old ideas with new outlooks, effects of the discovery of lands and forces hitherto unsuspected, had interfered with the human balance.

From the beginning, our people,—often miscalled new, although personifying all known civilizations,—were consumed by the desire for a literature of their own. The incipient or forgotten epics; the dramas, devoid of the simplest elements of either tragedy or comedy; the systems of philosophy or religion; the dreary romances; the political disquisitions,—all of which died only to mark some step in our history,—tell the melancholy tale of literary growth.

It was thought all along the line,—and the delusion is not entirely dissipated,—that a literature could be created, called into existence as if by the wand of a magician. The only ingredients needed were assumed to be novelty of conditions and education, and the result would be achieved. But neither a literature nor a rounded national character can be made in this way. No formal system of evolution was needed to prove that, in spite of theories and appearances, everything must grow. Our people continued for two hundred years to dream and pine for an original literature: yet as blindly slavish to recognized forms as if they had formally resolved to preserve inviolate all of humanity's ancient prescriptive rights.

II.

About 1820, with Washington Irving, in sketch and history; James Fenimore Cooper, in the novel; and Daniel Webster,—in whom they added a fourth great orator to the world's list,—they made a real start. Rapid progress was then seen, not along new lines, but on those incident to fixed rule and long use. From this time forward, history found many votaries, and Irving, Prescott, Motley, Parkman, and Ticknor were to illustrate for new readers some of the countries from which we had drawn population or ideas. Hawthorne was soon to write those immortal studies of our earliest men and women, while the most distinctive humanistic group thus far known in our history,—Bryant, Longfellow, Emerson, Lowell, and Holmes,—were to

add lustre to their country and to show that literary power had survived in spite of the deadening influence of materialism. These were accompanied by Channing and Audubon in other fields, as well as followed by innumerable pretenders, the amateurs of literature. By the time of the Civil War we had made a slow, painful beginning. We had historians of countries other than our own, had produced two great novelists, and a fair order of criticism, Lowell being the leader. There was no commanding poet or dramatist, no original contribution to science, no great biography,—except that of Franklin, which was brought to light in its entirety about this time,—almost no understanding of art, and still less of art itself.

The student will find in handbooks lists of names of American writers earlier than these, but it was not until this period that any actual start was made. Then came the Civil War, destructive not only of human life but of the higher intellectual activity and virility. For a time we were, as a people, in the position of a man of fifty who, after a life of struggle and success, finds that he must begin anew.

Although the fact is not fully realized, most of our original ideals had to be abandoned. Henceforth, America did not mean a new heaven but the old prosaic earth. Some hundreds of thousands of cannon shots, a million mourners, unnumbered ruined homes, violent and hurtful hates, and we had emerged from civil conflict a nation in a hurry; a people in a passion. Outwardly, these seemed to bring every order of material prosperity, yet with us, as everywhere in history, they were fatal to the art which has been the master-product of men,—something which, lying beyond necessities and material achievements, is foreign to the conception of the mere utilitarian. It has become impossible to determine whether art, at its best estate, can flourish in the atmosphere of democracy and irreligion, or whether what may remain of it is not a survival from some remote past, a left-over achievement of many generations.

III.

It is natural that the first desire of a people, after it has won political recognition, is to know something of itself. Like an

individual, it is interested in the genesis of its greatness or promise. Its patriotism is then no longer limited to the need for personal protection, or narrowed to a sense of favors expected. It has so passed out of the nomadic or uncertain stage, that the legends and traditions which envelop its dim origins and accompany the struggle for life and recognition, become part of itself. In more primitive times, this interest was represented by the songs, the visible story-tellers, the tales of patriarchs, the indefinite something by which man's interest in the past is manifested.

In its perfected form, when letters have once established themselves as part of his inheritance, he demands the written record of his family, ancestry, and neighborhood. Then imagination takes longer flights: he seeks knowledge about other families, ancestors, and neighborhoods. Almost before he knows it, he has begun to study history. He has a new patriotism, still often narrow and truculent, but as his range of ideas has acquired more breadth and comprehension, his interest embraces the world. He finds that in the one place or another, in the small or large, in an old or a new country, in a county or the world, the impulses of human nature differ little from those which move the individuals by whom he is surrounded. He sees that this likeness,—the tendency of men to take one course as units, another in a crowd, still another in an army, and to adopt different methods as a people or a nation,—is universal, and he is ready to generalize about mankind. When he has reached this stage, history has a philosophy, and he spends much time and ingenuity in speculations upon the new and curious phenomenon.

IV.

Our people have been forced to take even a wider view in their recognition of both the fact and the philosophy of history. They soon gathered their own legends and traditions and began to cherish them. They also came to have a clearer identity with the neighborhoods and countries from which they or their ancestors had derived. They began by writing of their struggles with savages which were nothing like so severe or continuous as

those with nature ; but the one being concrete, the other abstract, our early writers tell us much, in a way crude and often exaggerated, about Indians and themselves, while giving only small attention to natural history : the things that the earth, as such, contained.

Their theological struggles were to them very real : hence the story of superstition, intolerance, misunderstanding, and downright cruelty, is one of the most sordid in human annals. The glorious promises of freedom or the prospects of larger opportunities, were soon lost sight of in the quarrels of petty sects, too new to have pride in the genuine triumphs of our religion and too narrow to see anything in life beyond their own narrow boundaries when they found themselves drest in the little brief authority, always dangerous.

In spite of these limitations, our forerunners began both to write and to make such history as they could in the way open to them. As they became more and more self-contained, they forgot or overlooked the larger origins or the remoter beginnings, and narrowed themselves more to their immediate surroundings. For a long time their history was a register of men's doings on a small scale. They saw less and less of the past, and probably few generations have peered into the future with less purpose than did those who held the stage in this country between, say, the year 1640, when most of the Puritan and Pilgrim immigrants were over ; and 1763, when France was expelled from the continent.

When they had won some position, they desired to know more of their origins near at hand. We thus early became our own ancestors. Say what we will about our democratic principles, the instinct of ancestry worship lay strong within us. Perhaps it has seldom come out stronger in human history than up to the time when the strange hordes from Europe began to overwhelm us about 1850. It was then and for a long time manifested by our brutal treatment of immigrants, by the course of politics, in social life, and in those forms which vanity and intolerance engender.

V.

Although this instinct was to have larger scope than would have been deemed possible so early in the growth of a people on new scenes, it was long before we could apply it to study, on large lines, so far as our own history was concerned. The conditions were opposed to this. No man without regard to ability or scholarship, or however well buttressed with facts, could presume, until a few years ago,—even now it is a dangerous process,—to tell the story of our early differences with the Mother Country. It was not until Jefferson Brick had ceased to be a distinctive character that we could see some of the truth, much less tell it. For a home writer to hint a fault subjected him to anathema; even the foreigner who could judge our life with other than a complimentary epithet or conclusion was sentenced to every form of punishment which it was in our power to inflict.

When our scholars could not write of their own country they found others: the instinct for letters sought an outlet. Irving gathered up the romance of Spain, and Ticknor criticized its literature; Prescott wrote of Peru and Mexico; Motley studied the struggles for liberty in the Netherlands, and Parkman fixed in unchangeable colors the contest of France and England on this continent, taking care, however, never to venture upon our own corporate history. It was always open to our scholars to interpret every country save England and America: many writers having dealt with our political history, but thus far with small success.

The obvious reasons for this failure have already been noted; but the real causes lie deeper. However qualified or independent a student might be, scarcely an episode in the early life of our people is sufficiently remote or independent to permit the interpretation of its full meaning. We may compile last year's annals, or those that cover our life of three hundred years, but as we can see little more of the philosophy of the one than of the other, neither is history. They deal with those questions which, as Emerson says, "look differently to the years and the centuries."

Chaotic origins, themselves complicated by still remoter beginnings; an unformed and formless life; struggles to conquer nature, and as man must, to make it over; contests with savages and then with ourselves; always confronted by human nature, and the necessity, early forced, of so developing material resources that the world might be fed and clothed,—all these are processes which, though lying at the foundations, are generally overlooked and have so interfered with the forces of evolution that any true or complete history has been beyond our power.

VI.

Our students have sought to write national history and have also been possessed with the idea that they could do it with a semblance of finality. Their ideas and industry have been creditable. If they had not presumed to sum up the achievements of men on new scenes, they would have deserved ampler recognition and have done better work. If they had seen that, in the race of humanity, we have not thus far gone around the track seriously, but have only made some imitation trial gallops, they would have done well. But, mistaking the theories of a Swiss madman and his wild followers for real contributions to the philosophy of government and society, they have sought to justify them without any conception of the fact that we had been carried fast and far from human nature.

It was not only impossible thus early to tell the story of our social and political evolution, but still more time must elapse before the work can be undertaken. In the court of history ideas must appear in the light of success or failure: not as they are interpreted by theorists or agitators. We have not always had the courage to confess that the assertion of rights and claims does not assure them. Until we get away from a fixed, unalterable point of view, we shall have no history or any other literature. Men do not long adjust themselves to a theory unless it approves itself, nor is it possible for the historian to make a permanent record until he has divested himself of this hampering accompaniment. When the student of American conditions shall see that we differ little from those human ele-

ments from which we derived, it will become clear that, after all, we are no chosen people exempt from the conditions and infirmities that must everywhere accompany growth.

VII.

If real history is still remote from us, we are beginning so to collect some of its materials that, in years to come, our successors may not have only tools to work with but that the serious-minded student may learn easily more of our philosophy. The careers of the founders of our society from its earliest day have been recorded with a fidelity which will facilitate the task of the future historian. The patient delvers who in each generation attempt to estimate the work and contribution of their immediate predecessors, have so blazed the trails that successors of the same type may be trusted to keep them marked.

Recognizing their limitations, our students are collecting materials with some approach to system. It is fashionable to laugh at the monograph, even if we live under its tyranny. By nature, it is a form of literature which gives little scope for either philosophy or style, but the patient gathering of facts dealing with primitive customs, or with the growth of town, district, State, or institution, will be of distinct value. In times to come, the real historian will examine them with honest discrimination, in order to give some idea of what manner of people these early white Americans were. He will be grateful to the men who found time and inclination to search out some fact otherwise lost, to examine a theory, to discard an inference, once generally accepted, because it fell in with the general ideas upon religion or government, which, prevailing at a given time, were impossible of application to a world filled with real men.

Perhaps few men in the world's history have been better interpreted to future generations than those found at the sources of our larger national life, whose works and fame are now secure possessions. This work was done by themselves: not by the historian, whether professional or amateur. Gradually, but surely, fiction has been excised, myths exploded, and hero-worship eliminated. The fierce light which beats upon a period of violence has brought out their characters. Their immediate

successors have also stood the test well. The halo of the romantic did not so surround them, but where this quality was found, as in Jackson and Clay, it was understood and appreciated. They were so distinctly the beneficiaries of biography that we now know the times of Webster, Benton, Calhoun, Hayne, and their contemporaries, better than the events which happened only ten years ago.

VIII.

During the past fifty years current biography has become almost a lost art. No distinctive autobiography other than that pathetic and partial record written on Mt. McGregor has enriched our literature. The great, strong men of the Civil War period still await the writing of their story. We have the sketch, the slight impressionist view: and little more. Of them all, the true Lincoln lies buried under a ten-volume book,—too long for biography, too near the time and too tenuous for history. As there are heaped upon it nearly fifty-score other volumes, we have a myth quite worthy of Homeric times,—but still a myth.

Perhaps we shall never know the inner philosophy of any other great actor in the civil war on the Federal side. Seward, Stanton, Johnson, Stevens, McClelland, and Sumner are rapidly becoming little more than names. The tide of oblivion threatens them: in winning, they may have gained the guerdon of the forgotten. This is due largely to changes in the character of our population. Probably three-fifths of the people now living north of the Potomac and the Ohio have no American ancestry earlier than 1850. With them, as with others in whom there are no American traditions, the real pride must be absent. Their children may invoke the flag at rising, or salute it at school, or they may keep a memorial day: but none of these ceremonies can have for them any real meaning.

Doubtless, owing to the homogeneity of its people, the South has been both more mindful and more fortunate. It is also surprising, when the literary claims of New England are considered, that the memoirs of Southern leaders have been written earlier and with greater fulness than in the North, while many foreign

critics have found in the lives and campaigns of Lee and Stonewall Jackson the inspiration denied them in the North.

Illustrative of this neglect, when last year there died a former President,—the most conspicuous seen for more than forty years,—not one newspaper in the land printed a biography or an estimate fairly adequate.¹ Men and women who had reached their maturity during the preceding decade were provided with no material for understanding one who had done both them and their country a high and honest service.

IX.

During the past quarter of a century no form of literature, except the poem, has suffered such degradation as the novel. At once the accepted medium for the play of imagination and for the higher study of mankind, no addition of first order has been made to it. This conclusion applies to all countries and languages. From Russia, on one side, to the Eastern shore of Behring's Sea, on the other, the same tale of neglect and mediocrity is told. It is equally illustrated by the pretensions of the school of analysis and the inanities of the latest best seller. No relief or promise is found in the novel proper, but the short story,—an entirely different form of fiction,—has relieved the dull mass, now and then, with a touch of nature or a living character.

It is a sad generalization,—though neither a sweeping nor a dangerous one,—to assert that, out of the hundreds of writers who have affected the novel as a form of expression, none has created a single character standing out in the great hurly-burly life of which this body of work is supposed to be the mirror, whose name and person, good or bad, whose habit of thought and characteristics, has taken its place in the structure of our society or reflects life as it really exists among us.

It is a sad loss to humanity, and a more serious one to letters, when a generation thus fails to contribute new figures to fiction or poetry,—both of them forms of art whose men and women are more real than most of those that have lived in the flesh.

¹ Within the last month Mr. Parker's *Recollections of Grover Cleveland* has appeared from the press of The Century Company.—EDITOR.

Thackeray averred that, to him, Sir Roger de Coverley was quite as much alive as Dr. Johnson, or Oliver Goldsmith, or Henry Fielding. The long procession of great characters in English fiction from Squire Western to Mrs. Proudie, is invested with an interest deeper and more pervading than that which surrounds Prime Ministers and Archbishops. Don Quixote and Sancho Panza will live when the two Philips, under whom their creator served, are forgotten and their persecutions and bigotry have faded into dim traditions. Becky Sharp is more alive in the court of history than the First Gentleman in Europe, to whom she courted with so much of vanity and grace. Arthur Dimmesdale with his awful tragedy has more of the matter in him than John Endicott. Mr. Pecksniff is fuller of interest than Lord Liverpool, and Mrs. Poyser stands out more than the real Duke of York who lived and moved in the world of her shadowy day.

These are some of the immortal creations of great art; if no associates of their own rank join them, then the world is so much the poorer. If the marionettes which dance their brief and listless hour through the modern novel are the best that democracy can do in the way of creating character, there will not long be wanting those who will sigh for the return of a time when there may be more scope for real art and genius, even if it shall eliminate some of the persons who talk so glibly about equality while forgetting that what men really need is equity. It is worse than a libel upon our character and achievement to assume that the crowd of idlers, swindlers, roués, flirts, incompetents, mediocrities, and slum-dwellers who march endlessly through the pages of the average novel, fairly represent the people among whom eighty millions of us live and move, day by day.

It is clear that if the novel is to hold its own it must return to accepted standards, or make higher ones of its own. It cannot otherwise maintain its place as the interpreter of life. It may be part of its function to interest, or to fill an idle hour: but the power to do these was not wholly wanting even in the highest examples of the art of fiction at its best estate. When the novelist shall cease to confuse the neighborhood with the

world, the individual with the type, the freak with the average, he may portray the real pioneer woman; the enterprising man who, an example of personal industry and thrift, is also the master public spirit of ten thousand communities; the genuine teacher to whom a thousand boys look up as maker or savior; the commanding business man who is not also a monster; or the statesman who is not first of all a villain.

The variety of character and situation is infinite; when both are so studied that the loves and hates, the aspirations and ambitions, the sacrifices and victories, and the successes and failures of the men and women in a strong, well-poised society have been delineated by men of genius, will be the fitting time to talk about fiction being a finer art than it was in the days of Dickens and Thackeray. It will then be in order to patronize Hawthorne and so keep up with the latest literary fashion, or we may refine and analyze down to the finest point, but we shall, at least, have started on the way towards something of value and permanence. It will then appear that the American is a man of men,—not a member of some race with a mysterious force,—wholly different from his kind.

X.

Another department of literature which demands consideration is criticism. Seldom creative, it is scarcely less important than those already discussed. It blazes a trail through the vast wood of literature so that those so minded may avoid the undergrowths: the hopeless jungle that often grows even under the shade of the forest giant.

When literature ceased to be the sole possession of the scholar and became the heritage of all with taste or ability to understand its message, there came, all along the line, the critic, both instructed and candid. Erasmus, Ben Jonson, Milton, Addison, Steele, Dryden, Pope, Bentley, Fielding, Samuel Johnson, Goethe, Macaulay, Gifford, Sydney Smith, Jeffrey, Hazlitt, Lamb, Carlyle, Thackeray, Sainte Beuve, Ruskin, Scherer, Taine, Renan, Swinburne, Matthew Arnold, Lowell, Cranch, Charles Eliot Norton, and John Morley have, in succession, turned the light of genius upon their own and other times.

They have not been purveyors for publishers,—mere Grub street hacks,—nor door-openers for the literary scavenger. Great writers themselves, they have sat in judgment,—with full minds and in perfect honesty,—questioning, with a keen sense of their own responsibility, the claims of contemporaries and predecessors to a place in the world of letters.

But the great critic who dealt with imaginative literature has apparently disappeared. Its degradation,—due to absence of taste or critical capacity in the constituency of new readers,—bids every honest man pause before he consents to enter upon such a career. It is a more serious drawback that the majority of readers do not want guides. Looking upon reading as something with which to kill time, to them

“A book’s a book, although there’s nothing in’t.”

They can only comprehend the bold advertisement, the brief notice which, ending with an admonition to buy, contains the announcement that a given number of persons, foolish or otherwise, have bought or read. This leaves no scope for the real reviewer. As a result, he must betake himself to the study of fixed or settled forms of literature, or to other departments in which there may remain some seriousness.

XI.

This is accentuated by the fact that our popular literature no longer reflects the change in the fundamentals of our life and ideals. We flouted ceremonial: we end by becoming its slaves. Once we protested even against the Order of the Cincinnati, while all hereditary societies or institutions were our bane: now we have more imitations than the world contains of originals. We pass through a war, however small or unworthy, and it produces new orders of Veterans, Sons or Daughters, each with its line of succession: asserting authority or quarreling among themselves over nothings. We started out with the idea that we lived under written constitutions: we cast them aside without flutter or protest and welcome the continued assertion and exercise, over a period of many years, of an authority little less than

absolute. Our extreme ideas of democracy thus run on only by momentum.

Yet none of these tendencies excites intelligent protest or finds serious consideration in the literature of the day. Time was, in our boasted Anglo-Saxon world, when poet, essayist, critic, novelist, and historian, keeping abreast of tendencies, would have thundered anathema and our old aspirations would have found a new assertion, if not defence. It follows that our literature is not up to date. We are too busy designing, building, or running new printing-presses and making cheap paper to care for such facts or to utter the wholesome word of protest.

This decay of interest in the ideals upon which the structure of our society rests is more serious as a sign of the time than the failure to write a real history or a true novel. It marks a decline in a quality which has helped us over many trials and difficulties. It warns us that the old-time, boasted division into parties has been lost: that, as in other democratic societies, the trend is towards one. While we may still have the wagon: we have lost the brake. The power to protest with vigor and intelligence seems to have departed, leaving us content with the interested demagogue as the organ of public opinion, and the sensational writer as historian. As we seem to be satisfied that questions have only one side, the impulse to look for another has apparently become atrophied.

That literary criticism is needed, now as ever, is shown by science and theology. Here the instructed mind deals with the great ideas and commanding contributions to them. In these departments of thought there are still serious readers who recognize the value of time, and welcome the knowledge and help of others. But the popular novel, which does not live six months and has no permanent influence upon life, what need has it for criticism?

As writing is the one trade in which training, discipline, and apprenticeship are unnecessary, the fashioning of a novel is as open to the school-girl as to the greybeard, to the tramp as to the millionaire, to the waiter as to the statesman. The barricades formerly erected by the critic were the only protection the

public had. Now that these have been thrown down, there is nothing.

XII.

This levelling down of a great art to a crude taste has an effect not entirely expected. It has thrown the really intelligent and serious-minded readers, of whom there are more than ever before, back upon the great writers of the ages, and upon the history of the beginnings of man. At no time in history have a greater number of persons been interested in the past. At no time have there been more acceptable studies of those historical periods which, by reason of distance, really lend themselves to the art of the historian. As an effect, literary appreciation is dividing itself more and more into recognition of the classic. The dead are gaining the constituency of thinking readers, though not at the expense of the living. They are taking and holding possession of the educated and cultured reader.

The practical absence of a new creative literature promotes division into classes and creates and aggravates intellectual caste. Rival standards of taste are created, between the coteries of which there is little sympathy or association. One order is devoted to the masterpieces of all time and has little interest in the things or the thought of the time; the other is blown about by every wind of doctrine from whatever quarter, and confuses education,—that indefinable discipline of the mind,—with apprenticeship, the application of training to industrial ends.

The objection is sometimes urged that the accepted standards are so exacting as to be impossible of application. It is often argued that, in these democratic times, permanence is neither necessary nor desirable. According to this theory, while art is common-place, it gives a momentary pleasure to shallow minds, and has thus served its purpose. We are assured that the competition of the dead is reduced, the past is forgotten, superstition dies, tradition is lost,—as the materialists think it ought to be,—man becomes a mere thing of the present who struggles, fails, and passes away so that another may take his place and repeat these processes. This may be the logic of the crowd: but it tolls the knell of seriousness in literature.

XIII.

If an age or people can content itself with marking time in the qualities of the mind, well and good ; but it should not deceive itself into the belief that in so doing, it is making a real impression upon its time. If this were even a plausible theory we might well ask what profit will come from levying heavy and burdensome tribute upon industry on the plea of providing mental discipline for all. When, then, may society expect to get adequate return? Why should a people, any more than a man, be puffed up with pride unless it adds its share to all the forces and ideas that enter into the makeup of civilization?

Nor is it profitable to conceal the defects which are only too apparent. When, at any period in life, an intelligent, ambitious individual, finds himself lagging behind what he knows to be his capabilities, he studies and works to make up for lost time. So it should be with a people. Its obligation is to realize when it is not doing its part. Only in this way can it escape from the self-satisfaction so easy to acquire, so difficult to avoid. There is scarcely any people, however backward,—if not actually in decay,—which does not employ this process when it finds its industries declining, or the material side of life less attractive. It changes its methods, introduces machinery, trains its population to efficiency, even makes over its government.

While it is more difficult to get a hearing for intellectual than material things, and the process is slower, it is not impossible. We cannot create seriousness of purpose by wishing or by fiat, but we may grow it, if we once realize that the great civilizations which have preceded us have gone to pieces, or lost their power through that neglect of the intellectual which surely accompanies the over-cultivation of the material. In this, as in all else, we must get away from the relentless tyranny of the numbers theory. Great questions of art can no more be settled by a count of heads than by an imperial or presidential edict. Its standards, fixed by the experience and consent of the ages, are subject to the operation of law which controls everything human. In literature, no number of readers, however great, can give even the most modest position. No amount of puffing will have

any influence other than purely commercial or temporary. Critics or coteries can do little to keep life in something that ought to die stillborn, nor can they prevent due recognition of work worthy of it. It is thus imperative to adhere strictly to rules which, as they are not the product of chance, are not subject to change.

As time and taste must control, neglected or overlooked genius does not enter into account. A soldier finds his level, a trader wins his place, a student must make before he can hold a place in his class. This is equally true of the artist in whatever field. It is no more the world's way or its business to provide food, shelter, or clothing than it is to give recognition unearned. He is here to do what is wanted; if he does not or cannot, the necessity for him is clear—find another occupation. If he only skims the surface, he must expect a surface recognition: he fixed his own limitations and is little likely to rise out of them. That American writer who was able to command a remunerative pot-boiling occupation as the concocter of blood-and-thunder stories, was no doubt disappointed when he found that even the ordinary modern novel was impossible for him. He had made his bed: he had to lie in it.

XIV.

It remains to consider the obligation of educated men and women to our contemporary literature. If this sense of responsibility is not found in our universities and colleges, where may we hope to seek it? To begin with, these now contain nearly as many teachers as there were students half a century ago. So it is pertinent to inquire what standard they have fixed. Where does their example lead?

It is not that they should all write books. God forbid. But do they see or realize the defects of their time? Are they qualified, not merely to instruct in the surface things put down in the books,—many of them trifling and unworthy,—but do they know something of the philosophy of literature so that they can meet the demands of their profession rather than make of themselves mechanics following a trade? Do they resist the wild, ruinous, and heartless agitations made by designing men

about little things? Or, do they surrender to them and thus make the metal mercury the symbol of the time? Are they so wrapped up in their new sociologies and psychologies and other ologies and pathies as not to see that most of these have gone over their trial trips, time after time, only to fail?

There is no place in the student's life for platitudes, for attractive but shallow phrases which can hold no permanent sway over the mind. It is well to have great endowments, it is perhaps inevitable that we should have pensions, paid not by the direct beneficiaries of education but from funds furnished by the rich. It is, however, vital to have a strong, well-trained, courageous teaching body who, knowing for themselves the boundaries of knowledge, stand ready to limit and define them for the young.

Horace Greeley, defending himself from hostile criticism for signing the bail bond of Jefferson Davis, insisted that it was not his duty to tell the people what they wanted to hear, but what they needed to be told. So it is with the teacher. He enforces discipline not for his own good, but for that of the student. In the greater field of the world, this is not promoted by insisting that ours is the best of all possible literatures in the best of all possible worlds, but by showing where it is weak as well as where it is honest and wholesome.

Then, where are we to look for intelligent and efficient work in promoting a creditable literature and extending the zone of what we now have, if not to the great body of men educated and trained in college? We are now turning out nearly forty thousand of them every year. Formerly there was a wholesome rivalry in intellectual activity between them and the self-made man. The latter still exists, but his type has changed. It has become so easy to obtain the advantages of a systematic education that few are unable to avail themselves of its advantages or always to escape its drawbacks.

It would be interesting if we could but learn what proportion of the graduates turned out each year comes to know in a large way even the really strong men who made our early history and wrote its records. How many are familiar with Franklin's *Autobiography*,—perhaps the greatest ever written,—or with that

quaint body of writing which makes up his works? How much do we read of Washington, not merely about him, besides his *Farewell Address*; now deemed fitting mental food for children at play? How many seek out the solid sense in John Adams's writings and letters? We hear much about Jefferson as a destroyer: how many know him as one of the great conserving forces of modern history, or as a man who, fearing power, knew how to use it greatly? How much recognition is there of the contradictory ideas which controlled Madison's mind, now on one side, again on another? Students read Hamilton mostly for the purpose of bolstering up a party or a fiscal policy: how many see or understand the philosophy which makes him the prophet of American political thought? How many see in John Marshall the real creator of a nation, a man unscared by theories?

These men are among the real, the distinctive authors we have thus far produced. We read *about* these men. As Erasmus said: "We kiss the old shoes of the saints, but we never read their works." Study of their writings, knowledge of the processes of their minds, would give every man of discriminating taste power to reach his own conclusions about our ideas and institutions and to understand how far we have traveled from the roads they made. They called themselves revolutionists when in reality they were persistent and patient evolutionists, doing the best they could with the materials at their disposal. In our epidemics of hysteria we might as a people well turn to them, assured of finding wisdom and safety. We should have far to seek for a sign of that fierce fever into which we sometimes throw ourselves, and they would furnish panaceas in our popular paroxysms. We should always be dealing with statesmen, not with pretenders or the mere tonguesters so mercilessly lashed by Tennyson.

These observations also apply to the study of the line of writers who have made for themselves and us a position in the literature of the world. Do our men and women of education study and know as they deserve the works and the philosophy of Cooper, Channing, Emerson, Longfellow, Prescott, Parkman, Motley, Hawthorne, Whittier, Lowell, Holmes, Stedman, and

Aldrich? Or are they not rather drawn, many times, to the pathetic madness of Poe, the coarseness of Whitman, or the foolishness of the modern horse-play school of humor?

XV.

It is clear, then, that we have a need for creative work ; that we must recognize our shortcomings and realize that, if we are to supply the one or overcome the other, systematic effort will be necessary. Who must make it? It must lie with the men and women who are qualified to contribute to the intellectual life. Always limited in its higher reaches to the few : it is aristocratic in the best sense of that almost obsolete word. It is not produced by wealth which, here as everywhere and always, is its worst enemy. It is as far as possible from the so-called leisure class for which so many dream and pine as the saviors of society.

As it is the heritage or creation of a few, they must see to it that it is maintained, reënforced, and extended. It will lose so many from its own ranks that, as in his dream Jacob saw the ladder to heaven covered with angels both going up and coming down, the intellectual life both loses and gains. Whatever dangers may exist in other directions from the thing called socialism, the mind is free from them. The world must still look to it for guidance in working its way slowly and patiently, even out of material difficulties and problems. If there is a necessity for a new distribution of population over the earth, so that it may not become a danger anywhere, the idea, the motive, the plan must be supplied by the mind looking upward. The mental qualities out of which literature grows must also see, discover, and explore a continent, diversify and extend industry, and modify or develop social systems.

If we must assimilate uncounted millions of men little fitted for any task, again it is a work for the mind. We can turn over the rough work of building, or of transportation and mining industries to rude, industrious men from one country after another ; but they would be only an idle, howling mob, under the control of ignorant, selfish, and interested leaders, were there not somewhere large and unselfish mind, or minds, to direct or

control a mass else inert and even dangerous. It is to this leadership, recruited constantly and slowly from those ascending the ladder that we must trust.

So long as the origin, course, and destiny of man have an interest, so long will there be an atmosphere in which the intellectual life will survive and flourish, and there need be no dread that materialism will register a final triumph. But, if the lesson is not enforced continually that neglect of opportunities, and splendor and luxury are perilous to the higher things and promote the smaller and meaner, we shall come to grief and ruin like those who have preceded us upon this world's theatre.

XVI.

Art had its origin and long made its home in warm climates, under burning suns,—where material needs were simple and a kindly nature made their satisfaction easy. There the margin of labor and genius found its way into objects of beauty, things not wholly utilitarian. Literature, painting, sculpture, architecture, philosophy, religion in its higher forms—all found there their beginning and their highest development. They were produced amid surroundings of universal slavery. The surplus energy of men of larger mould, thus left free, promoted the production of the higher things: study of man and nature, and visible objects of beauty, poetry, tragedy, comedy, history or fitting temples.

Conversely, in every northern environment, the making and maintenance of art, whatever its form, has been difficult. It has been an exotic, transplanted into a hard soil and surrounded by an unfriendly air. Its growth has been slow and tedious, while its votaries, few in number, have had upon them serious obligation, an almost abnormal sense of responsibility.

The same difficulties are encountered in all ages and in every part of the world in those periods known as material. The so-called practical man is then the high priest and prophet. He avows disbelief in learning, looks upon sculpture as an adjunct of cemeteries, considers painting a waste of raw material and labor; prefers a square box for a house, and thinks all religion a

superstition. He is the personification of the yellow primrose view of life.

It is through their art that the peoples of the earlier world still survive. We imitate their sculptures, without the hope of equaling them. We have adapted their design for utensils, often ruining their beauty and symmetry. We cherish the fragments of literature which have come down to us, and desecrate graves again and again, in the hope of finding more.

They built great dams and bridges: but they have been lost or destroyed. Their wealth was phenomenal: but not a penny of it has descended to the natural heir for a thousand years. They used free circuses and bread to influence voters or keep the peace: and the lineal successors of their dependents are to-day scattered as paupers over all the modern world.

If thinking, educated men and women will realize that a never-ending struggle is necessary to preserve the love of the beautiful and to extend the domain of taste so that intellect can register its triumphs, they may well revive both the form and the spirit of the familiar Latin prayer; *Da mihi, Domine, scire quod sciendum est*. "God grant that the knowledge I get may be the knowledge worth having."

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